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Russians who want America to ditch SALT



This is the first of a number of articles that ROY MEDVEDEV, a leading Marxist dissident, hopes to contribute from Moscow.

MANY ARTICLES are now appearing in the Soviet Press about the opponents of SALT II in the American Senate, and their attempts to stop ratification. But hardly anyone asks if the treaty has opponents in Russia. Assuming American ratification, Moscow's ratification will, of course, be a formality. Less obvious is the fact that there were strenuous behind-the-scenes arguments before the treaty was put forward for signature.

Under the American system of government, the decisive debate continues after the President's signing of a treaty. In Russia the argument all happens *before* the signing (though what is said may seldom come to light).

The enemies of détente have certainly made their presence felt inside the Soviet Party leadership. Differences over Brezhnev's policy were a reason for the removal from the Politburo of Sholest in 1972 and Shelepin in 1975. Critics of SALT II in the present Politburo appear to have included chief ideologist Suslov and Moscow Party boss Grishin. It also seems that Minister of Defence Ustinov and the KGB chief Andropov

were able to drag out the preliminary negotiations on SALT by submitting endless details for expert approval.

It is unclear whether Gromyko was involved in their efforts. But he, too, managed to spin out the talks under different pretexts. And he is too old a hand not to have realised that his recent declaration that Soviet Union will not countenance any amendments by the Senate was bound to prejudice the chances of ratification.

One naturally asks: wouldn't a hitch in ratification favour a particular Moscow power group, especially at a moment of possible leadership change? Some attentive observers have already sensed a link between certain events and attempts to complicate the SALT negotiations. Thus 1977 saw provocatively timed arrests of well-known dissidents on the eve of the arrival in Moscow of Secretary of State Vance (whose SALT mission was doomed in advance because of President Carter's human rights statements).

And in 1978, several times postponed, the Orlov Ginzburg and Shcharansky trials coincided with talks between Vance and Gromyko in Geneva. The trials obliged Presi-

dent Carter to take a number of economic and political actions with the result that many people thought that SALT II was put at risk. What actually happened was that American foreign policy responses to internal Soviet events allowed the Soviet Union negotiators to take a harder line at the SALT talks.

In the event it was the Americans who showed greater impatience to conclude an agreement. Only later did the Soviet leadership make a series of liberal gestures (the exchange of political prisoners, the easing of Jewish emigration) that were obviously calculated to create a more favourable atmosphere in the American Congress.

All the same, the treaty as signed in Vienna is a compromise between its supporters and its opponents in the Soviet ruling élite, and a check to its ratification could be a defeat for the principal supporters of Brezhnev's policies, as well as a political and strategic setback for the US Administration.

Modern weapons are becoming an increasing brake on the development of the as 10-15 years ago many mili-

tary-industrial enterprises assisted in the production of ordinary consumer goods, the picture has now changed.

In 1960-67 it was quite normal, given the difficulty of fulfilling economic plans, to order many kinds of 'peaceful equipment' (tractor parts, for example) from military factories. Army construction battalions even built ordinary civilian apartment blocks in Moscow and other cities. Now the reverse is more common: enterprises producing for the civil economy often receive military orders for special components and spares.

Lack of finance or technology has caused the production of consumer goods to fall behind plan (not to mention demand) for five or six years now. The economy is suffering from lack of skilled labour, the rate of increase in consumer goods output has sharply declined, and agricultural production is in a state of stagnation that makes it impossible to keep pace with the urban population increase. As a result, those responsible for these branches of the economy, as well as the party leaders at the local and regional level (who have no concern for a strong interest in reducing military spending,

Stalinist terror

But the armed forces and military industry can advance powerful arguments through their representatives in the Politburo. One must not forget that in 1941-45 a large part of the Soviet Union endured enemy occupation from which it was freed only at the price of huge human and material losses. The military decided that only strategic superiority could guarantee future security.

Another ground for the political influence of the military is the huge losses they suffered in the Stalinist terror of 1937-38. Nearly nine out of every 10 generals were arrested and shot in that period—men famous since the Revolution. Nearly every military district chief, nearly every official in the army political directorate, numerous admirals, six deputy commissars of defence, the head of every military academy and many chiefs of military planning staffs were disposed of. Suffice it to say that of 199 divisional commanders on active duty in 1936, 136 were arrested and shot in 1937-38.

No army in a single war could lose so many senior commanders.

After the war Stalin systematically retired all those commanders who had been promoted and became famous, beginning with the most famous of all, Zhukov. When Stalin died it was these men who became mainly responsible for the liquidation of the Beria group and for strengthening the power of Khrushchev. In 1957 it was Zhukov as Minister of Defence who assured Khrushchev of victory over the politically more influential group of Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich and Bulganin.

Similarly, in 1964 it was the army which helped the party group that organised Khrushchev's removal after he had lost its support. (The removal was prepared by Suslov, who was supported by the party apparatus, and by Shelepin using the KGB. But it was Brezhnev who emerged as leader, with military support.)

These actions by the military to create the sort of party leadership and security service they wanted were a direct reaction to the repression of 1937-38 and the mass dismissals of 1949-52. They and the military-industrial complex determined never again to be in a position of total dependence on the party dictatorship and to acquire real influence in national decision-making.

However, in the post-war period the Soviet Union was technologically and economically weak. The West had absolute strategic and economic superiority and could conduct policy from a position of strength, a fact driven home by Russia's humiliation in the Cuban missile crisis. After Cuba the military apparatus received a much broader base for its development and priority in the use of national resources.

The object of this was the achievement of strategic superiority, particularly in view of the growing threat from China. In 1977-79 Soviet tactical and strategic forces for practical purposes drew level with those of the West and in some cases overtook them. The SALT II agreement signifies the slowing down of this tendency and the abandonment of the earlier goal of superiority ('to catch up and overtake') in favour of that of 'parity.'

The difficulties which arose during the long drawn-out negotiations over SALT were due to this change of aim. Brezhnev and his circle had to convince the military of the necessity of compromise, which the economic interest of the country in general demanded.

In contrast to the situation in the American Senate no group in the Soviet Union could now stop SALT II ratification; nor is there any likelihood that the Soviet Union would violate the treaty once it enters into force. But there are influential groups in the USSR who would not mind at all if the US Senate refused to ratify the treaty, since that would represent a *fiat* for Brezhnev's policies.

In the present circumstances in the Soviet Union—the natural coming to an end of the power of Brezhnev's group—the failure of SALT II could mean only one thing — the likelihood of a new leadership that will lose no time in securing a more obvious military superiority. In which case any subsequent treaty would be certain to be less favourable to America than the present one.

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